UF
30
Zp
Box 4
no. 39

THE ASSEMBLY'S PLAN AND THE LAYMEN'S RESPONSIBILITY.

IBR

BY
WILLIAM J. MARTIN,
DAVIDSON, N. C.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE LAYMEN'S CONFERENCE, HELD AT MONTREAT, N. C. JULY, NINETEEN HUNDRED AND ELEVEN

UF
30
Zp
Box 2
no. 3

THE LIBRARY
UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Richmond 28227

PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION
RICHMOND, VA.

THE ASSEMBLY'S PLAN AND THE LAYMEN'S RESPONSIBILITY.

Two things I wish to say at the outset. First: The term "laymen" includes elders. This is not technically correct, but in the popular mind they are so included, and I desire to write of the responsibility of all outside the ministry.

Second: Notwithstanding the above I must emphasize the fact that, primarily, the responsibility for making effective this and all other plans for the church's work rests on the ministers. They are our God ordained leaders and we so accept them. The laymen never propose to usurp this place; they could not, with God's blessing, if they would. The laymen will follow and accept their responsibility only after the pastor has taken the lead and assumed *his* responsibility.

But to the pastors let me say, that, only as you lead us like *men*, sanely, hopefully, but boldly will we be influenced to follow enthusiastically. Many of our pastors are timid and afraid to lay heavy responsibility on their men. The men will never assume the burden. Lay it on wisely but *not* lightly. A man will do a man's work and no other appeals to him. Above all do not "protect" us so much. You will only keep us children in service and sacrifice. "Put it up to us" and leave it there. Now, while the laymen's responsibility comes *after* that of the pastor, it comes; and only as *we* discharge *our* duty in the premises will this or any other plan succeed. This Assembly's Plan for financing the Benevolent work of the church will never be a success unless the laymen make it so.

The Laymen's responsibility for this change in the church's financial system:

The Laymen must share the responsibility for the introduction of this plan into our church as a plan for the *whole* church. We, as well as the pastors,

gave voice to the desire for a change from the old system of Stated Collections, declaring it to be burdensome, unbusinesslike, inefficient. The collections, stated and special, had so increased that we cried out against the repeated urgings to give, give, give. For over one-third of the Sabbaths these appeals were due.

A change has been made and, while it will not entirely stop the cry against the raising of funds (for that cry will come from the covetous among us as long as a dollar is asked for), we are largely responsible for the change and the resulting plan. In fairness, then, we should study the plan and, in loyalty to our demand and to the church, we should try it faithfully.

HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION.

Moved by this rather universal demand from the church, but voiced specifically in overtures from the Presbyteries of Upper Missouri and East Hanover, the General Assembly at Savannah in 1909 appointed an able Ad Interim Committee of seven ministers and laymen, the principal duties of which were to consider and report to the next Assembly a plan for the Consolidation of certain of the Executive Committees, and a recommendation as to the making of the Assembly's Committee on Systematic Beneficence a Permanent Committee with enlarged duties. This committee made its report to the General Assembly at Lewisburg, W. Va., in 1910, which report, after extended discussion, was heartily and almost unanimously adopted. The recommendations of this Ad Interim Committee then became the order of the General Assembly. The Ad Interim Committee was enlarged and made a Permanent Committee on Systematic Beneficence, assigned certain duties to perform, and the Method, now known as "The Assembly's Plan," of raising funds for the Beneficences, as recommended by the Committee, was adopted. It is this plan we are discussing in this paper. Remember that this Plan was recommended to the General Assembly at

Lewisburg by the Permanent Committee on Systematic Beneficence and, after earnest consideration by that Assembly, heartily adopted, and the Committee was by the Assembly at Louisville authorized to push its adoption by the churches.

THE OLD METHOD ABANDONED.

Before outlining the new plan let me state briefly some of the reasons why the old method of "Stated Collections" was abandoned.

1. It was spasmodic. Once or twice a year the church was stimulated by special appeals to give to each cause in rotation. For the rest of the year the cause was not adequately kept before the people.

2. It was uncertain in results. Failure to warn the people of the approaching collection, forgetfulness on the part of the people even after such warning, bad weather or other cause resulting in a small congregation on the day of the stated collection, inadequate presentation of the cause, contributed to a small collection. The reversal of these conditions tended to a more generous response.

3. It was inadequate. The members who gave adequately and systematically to the causes were pitiably few, carefully estimated at not over 20 per cent. of the membership of the church. The result was that the Executive Committees received inadequate funds to carry on and push the great work of the church, and what they did receive came in so spasmodically, that they could neither properly plan the work nor pay the workers, often entailing real hardships on our poorly paid but heroic laborers. Without steady incomes large sums at heavy interest had often to be borrowed to prevent serious injury to current work.

4. It fretted the people. Both pastors and people were weary with the continual "begging" (so called) from the pulpit. The stimuli so oft repeated lost their effect and annoyed the people, till many were disposed to feel that the measure of worship and religion was made to consist mainly in dollars and cents.

5. To the thoughtful business man the method was thoroughly unbusinesslike, one not to be dreamed of in the conduct of his own business affairs. Result, he lost confidence and interest.

6. Other churches and communions had better, more businesslike, and more spiritual methods, and the same was demanded of our church.

As a result of this dissatisfaction the New Plan was recommended and adopted.

THE PLAN.

And now let me briefly put the plan before you in its main features.

It falls naturally into two parts. First, the plan of apportionments to the churches—which is informational in its nature—and, second, the plan for securing worthy contributions to the Causes of Beneficence, which we believe to be businesslike and scriptural.

HOW APPORTIONMENTS ARE MADE.

The Executive Committee for each cause, with all the facts and needs before it, makes up its budget for the coming year, stating what, in its best judgment, is the minimum amount it really needs to carry on its current work and meet the most insistent demands for enlargement. This budget is presented to the Assembly's Permanent Committee on Systematic Beneficence, which carefully reviews this and the budgets of all the Executive Committees, and presents them to the General Assembly with the recommendation that the church at large be asked for the amounts called for by the Executive Committees, or less, or more as the Permanent Committee thinks wisest.

The amounts decided upon by the Assembly for each cause are then sent back to its Permanent

Committee on Systematic Beneficence, whose duty it is to apportion them to the several Synods, and send the respective amounts, so apportioned, to the Permanent Committee of Systematic Beneficence of the Synods. The Synod's Committee on Systematic Beneficence then adds to the list of causes those Synodical in scope (*e. g.*, Synodical Home Missions, Synodical Orphanages, Synodical Schools and Colleges, etc.) and apportions the amounts for each cause to its different Presbyteries, sending the statement to the Presbyterial Committees on Systematic Beneficence. This Presbyterial Committee in turn adds to the list all Presbyterial causes (*e. g.*, Presbyterial Home Missions, Salary of Presbyterial Supt. of Home Missions, etc. [The apportionment for Presbyterial Tax which must be made by this committee and sent to the churches should be included by the churches in their Local Expenses and not among the Beneficences]) and apportions to each church what it believes to be its proper share for *each* and *all* benevolent causes (Assembly, Synodical, and Presbyterial). The method for doing this, *per capita*, according to financial strength, or otherwise will be determined by the conditions in each Presbytery.

Some oppose this plan asserting that it is an "Assessment." In no sense is it intended as such. Nowhere is provision made to "bring to book" or even technically hold responsible to the courts of the church any church failing to respond with its full "apportionment." Even the term "apportionment" is construed too strictly by some and with some resentment. Rather I interpret the whole plan as "informational"—just letting the stockholders in the great work of God in the world know what, in the judgment of those charged with the direction of the work, is needed to successfully prosecute it and what they deem to be a fair and proportionate share for each church to assume. The responsibility for the measure of response to this "information" is not between the church (or the individual) and the courts, but between the church (or the individual) and the great Head of

the church, Whose work it is and Whose is the money.

HOW THE MONEY IS TO BE RAISED.

For raising the money for the different Benevolences, the following plan, in outline, has been adopted by the General Assembly for use in the individual churches.

1. That the stated beneficences of the church be separated from its current expenses and local work of charity.

2. That, instead of depending on special Sabbath collections for the benevolent causes, each session appoint a Beneficence or Missionary Committee with a separate Treasurer.

3. That a canvass be made by this Committee of every member of the congregation for a subscription to these causes, to be paid at stated periods, weekly if possible, through duplex envelopes, or some other system appointed by the session.

4. Whether there shall be one canvass for all the causes, or two canvasses, one for the work at home and the other for the work abroad shall be left to the judgment of the session of each church.

The language here used by the Assembly is so plain that it would seem to call for little discussion or explanation.

I wish, however, to draw your attention to the fact, that, in the plan as stated, the General Assembly makes certain things "mandatory" upon the churches and leaves certain others to the judgment and wisdom of the individual session.

I realize that in speaking of the deliverance of the Assembly on this or other matters of procedure as being mandatory, I am "skating on thin ice." In matters of doctrine or dogma I believe we all recognize practically as well as theoretically the authority of our courts and the need of obeying their deliverances. In the matter of method or procedure we are not nearly so loyal, but are "congregations" in practice, if not in theory, rather than

"Presbyterian." Granting all that may properly be said regarding the ultimate authority of the session, I know there is far too great laxity on the part of the churches in carrying out the orders of the courts and this laxity, sad to say, in many instances, grows out of a positive indifference for the actions of our courts. This is not the time nor the place to discuss this matter, and I may stand on a *very* narrow platform, but to say the least, it is poor policy, if we desire our church to be effective in its work, to work as independent units, rather than as an organization of churches loyal in all things, to work together along common lines and by common methods under the leadership of our courts of authority.

To flatly disregard the direct orders of our highest court, even in the matters of procedure, because it does not suit us as an individual church and we do not like it, is to me a species of Christian anarchy. If the orders of our courts are not to be obeyed because we have no respect for the courts, then we should change the constitution and character of our courts till we can and will respect them.

With this idea in mind a study of the action of the Assembly in adopting the recommendations of the Permanent Committee on Systematic Beneficence will reveal, I think, the fact that the following parts of the Plan were made mandatory on the churches:

1. The separation of the stated beneficences of the church from the current expenses and local work of charity.

2. The appointment by the session of a Beneficence Committee with a *separate* Treasurer.

3. That this Beneficence Committee make a canvass of every member of the congregation for a subscription to the Beneficent causes, which pledges are to be paid at stated periods.

The following parts of the Plan were left optional with each session to be adopted and used or not as their judgment dictated:

1. As to whether the pledges should be paid weekly or at longer intervals.

2. Whether Duplex envelopes should be used or the session should adopt other methods for collecting the offerings.

3. Whether, *for the Beneficences*, there should be one canvass made covering all the Benevolent causes or two canvasses, one for Foreign Missions and a second for all other Benevolent causes.

(Note.—The Assembly foresaw that there would be some churches which could not at once adopt this change to the New Plan. These churches were believed to be few if all would conscientiously endeavor to arrange for the change even at some inconvenience and discomfort. But it would not do to leave even these few without *some* plan by which they could contribute to the great causes of the church. Consequently for these, and these churches alone, a purely *temporary* plan of a reduced number of Stated Collections was adopted; but with the distinct understanding, implied if not stated, that this was a temporary plan for just those churches and a plan to be abandoned by those churches just as soon as they could possibly arrange to adopt the New Plan.)

Let us understand that this New Plan calls for a complete separation of the Benevolent contributions of the congregation from the contributions for Local expenses. A church may or may not, at its own discretion, make an every member canvass for its local work, but the canvass (one or two) for the Benevolences *must* be separate and apart from any canvass for local work. Further this canvass for benevolences must be made by a special Committee —the Beneficence or Missionary Committee—appointed for this special purpose, which Committee does not have the canvass for Local work in charge. And further the funds for Benevolences must be sent to a special Treasurer, who is distinct from the Treasurer who has the handling of the gifts for Local expenses.

A good deal has been said about the constitution of this Beneficence Committee, but it is the writer's firm conviction that it, and its Treasurer, should be a sub-committee of the diaconate, working under the

authority of the Board of Deacons. It is, both from the standpoint of our Book of Church Order, and, we believe, from the teachings of the Bible, the great work the deacons are called to do; nor have we any right to relieve them of it nor to substitute others to do their work. There is nothing, however, in our Book, which prevents the diaconate associating others than their own members with this sub-committee of the deacons, for the purpose of making the every member canvass and securing the pledges. The deacons, under the guidance of the session, are charged with the handling of these funds and this duty should not be disturbed. There are, however, probably not enough deacons in any church to be divided into two committees and be effective in the canvass for pledges. It is certain, that if it is to be effectively done and result well, no member of the committee should have more to do than he can do in a comparatively few days. The canvass should not in any instance extend over two weeks and the more promptly it is completed and the reports made the better. For this reason it is best that a sufficient number not deacons be selected and made members of this committee for purposes of the canvass and that alone. It is needless to say the persons, both deacons and others, best suited and most in sympathy with the plan should constitute the committee.

THE PLAN COMMENDS ITSELF.

For several reasons the Plan commends itself to us.

1. It is not an untried plan in its essential features. Individual churches in our own Assembly have used it for some years past with marked success. Other communions have used it with good results. Quite a number of our churches have adopted it since the Assembly formulated it and report that it works well. The churches using it successfully include all kinds, city, town, village, country, mission churches.

2. It is a good business plan. First, because it is a *Plan* systematic and phable. It produces funds continuously and regularly throughout the year and

not spasmodically. When it shall have become fairly universal and well established, the results it will produce can be reasonably well forecasted, and the Executive Committees can, with prudence and some confidence, plan their financial outlay accordingly. The regularity of the income will enable regular payments to the field workers, and relieve a cause of serious embarrassment and hardship. It makes liberal giving on the part of the people generally far easier; for it is less difficult, for the most of us at least, to give regularly in smaller amounts than spasmodically in larger sums (witness the workings of this principle in the marvelous success and growth of our Building and Loan Associations.) It prevents the confusion of funds given for Benevolences with those for Local Expenses. Too much of "crossing accounts" and even wrongfully using the Benevolent funds for Local Expenses, either temporarily or permanently, has been done by our churches.

3. It is so comprehensive in its scope that its success means the improvement of every arm of our service. In Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth it stimulates the work and provides means (and workers) for doing the work. Each one can feel that the line in which he is especially interested is not neglected and further, that, through the plan, he is helping all parts of the work.

4. It is a Scriptural Plan—laying responsibility directly and pointedly on each one to respond in proportion to ability. Offerings are set apart systematically and made regularly and in God's house according to His appointment.

In addition to the above there are certain results, corollary in character, which ensue and strongly commend the plan to us.

1. It educates a large body of our laymen in the great benevolent work of our church—men who are now strikingly ignorant. The plans, method, scope, needs, successes, failures, and workers of our church, in its great compaign for Christ, are largely unknown to hosts, even of our church officers.

The plan calls for a comprehensive study and grasp of all this on the part of those presenting the cause and making the canvass.

2. It educates in a similar way the rank and file of those churches which adopt the system. Its presentation, coupled with a clear exposition of the causes it is meant to sustain, should precede the canvass. The progress of the canvass will open numberless opportunities for asking and answering questions about the use of the money and the church's work.

Further most men who are giving regularly, systematically, and in due proportion to any cause, are very apt to inform themselves clearly as to the cause, its needs, and success.

3. It trains a large body of our membership to real Christian service, both in advocating the plan and the causes it respresents from the platform, and in personal approach to others for their co-operation in Christian work by supporting the causes regularly and proportionately. This effort has in numbers of cases changed drones into effective workers, negative church members into live active supporters of the church and its work, nominal Christians into positive ones, and often into effective personal workers in winning souls. It raises up to the Pastor's hand a willing and effective set of members ready to actively co-operate with him in every good word and work.

Such fellow laymen are, in the main, the features of the new plan which commend its adoption.

I say, again, the responsibility rests with you, under the leadership of your pastors to put it into effective practice in the churches. No plan, however good, will work itself. Intelligent, patient, persistent, prayerful effort alone will conquer the conservatism, inertia, and prejudice towards anything new. The need for the change was evident. This plan has been supplied and adopted. The responsibility is on us to make it effective. The duty is clear. The call to service is a ringing call. Will it be heard and heeded? Will the service be rendered? Much depends on your response. If

you, as *elders* and *deacons*, will heartily *approve* the Plan, recommend its use, and make your contribution according to it and in liberality, the church will fall in line and great good will be accomplished. I want to raise the question with the laymen, especially the officers of the church—elders and deacons—Who *can* make this or any other plan effective if *you do not*? I believe I am safe in saying that unless *you* do, it will *not* be done. There lies *your* responsibility. Is it not the call of duty to the manhood of the church? It is a tremendous task our church has undertaken, to win its share of the world for the Master, at least to preach His Gospel to its share of humanity. Well do we know that nothing less than the Spirit of Almighty God is sufficient to the task. Yet well do we know that God expects to do this work *through* us and not *outside* of our agency. Prayer—yes, importunate, unceasing prayer—but for what? That God would by His will alone teach the world the Gospel and win the world to Himself? It is not God's way, and only in God's way can or will it be done. By the foolishness of preaching shall men be saved and "How shall they preach unless they be sent?"

It is an undertaking large enough and hard enough to challenge the virile manhood of Christendom—the responsibility is in like proportion.

You men say you cannot speak to a man about his soul's salvation. Your gifts do not lie in that direction. You can certainly find in this plan an opportunity for using for the Master your gifts as business men. You say the call of destitute fields at home and abroad does not come to you as urging *you* to "preach the Gospel." But by your cordial commendation and hearty co-operation, both by yourselves adopting the plan personally and canvassing others to do the same, you *can* and *will* witness for Christ in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The need for the plan and your service is there. You *know* the need. You have the power to meet the need. This constitutes your call to service. Will you decline the challenge?

Copies of this address may be had for free distribution by application to the PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION, Richmond, Va.